

Ten quick tips for managing your emotions in stressful situations

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We all have strategies for managing our emotions, some more effective than others. After a stressful day at work we might hit the gym or head out for drinks with our buddies. A regular exercise routine to keep our energy levels high or switching off in the evenings with a good book can be how we manage our moods proactively.

Broadening our emotion management toolkit

We often resort to less effective and sustainable tactics to manage emotional experiences. These may include blocking out negative emotions with excessive drinking, gaming or TV. Managing uncomfortable feelings and thoughts by persistently pushing them away is also counter-productive and often makes them persist and erupt when we least expect it. Emotion suppression over time is also associated with a raft of health problems. In contrast, dealing with our anger by yelling at our colleagues, even in a closed office, is more likely to inflate negative emotions rather than resolve them.

When our familiar coping strategies fail or aren't accessible, how do we manage our emotions effectively in the moment? How do we give ourselves more opportunities to respond intelligently rather than reactively in challenging, emotionally charged situations?

Being able to draw on a wide toolkit to select the right emotion management strategy for the situation is critical in the immediate and long term. This is one of the hallmarks of [Emotional Intelligence](#).

Emotion management strategies

Here are 10 simple strategies from our [Tools & Techniques Workbook](#) for managing emotions and tapping into your body and brain's capacity for generating positive mood.

- **Smile to make yourself feel good.** Find a mirror, make it fun. If it doesn't feel right to start with, you will soon be laughing at yourself and feel better naturally. The muscles we use to smile will tell our brain we are happy. Do it for at least 30 seconds.
- **Smile to make others feel good.** Create that connection, open communication, trigger those mirror brain cells that make us experience empathy for others.
- **Get up and move.** Jump around. It is important to move our lymph nodes to get toxins out of our body. Our lymphatic system doesn't have muscles to get it moving; it works when we move other parts of our body and allow gravity to massage it. Bouncing is the best way. Raising our arms generates the release of hormones under our armpits – often referred to as 'happy hormones'. Again, this will tell our brain we are happy and make us feel better. Get up from your desk regularly.
- **Check in with your body.** Do a body scan. Take note of where you are holding tension and your overall physiology. Relate these tensions and changes to the emotion you are feeling to begin to understand where and how different emotions affect you.
- **Physically remove the tension.** If you feel tense in the arms, shake your arms; if you feel tight in your chest, stretch and expand or breathe deeply.
- **Breathe.** Take 6 deep diaphragmatic breaths. Our body cannot sustain anger through deep breathing. Let the lower lungs have that oxygen to pass around your body and brain. This will calm you and flood you with oxygen. You may feel tingly. Do it for at least 60 seconds.
- **Talk to someone.** Express your feelings to begin to resolve the situation. Vent to a friend or colleague rather than suppress emotions.
- **Disengage and re-engage emotions.** Park a challenging emotion to deal with later, rather than just avoiding it. Acknowledge and accept the feeling then use your emotional intelligence to help generate a more useful emotion.
- **Label your emotion.** The part of the brain that can label or name an emotion is the same part that 'feels' the emotion. Labelling is proven to reduce the intensity. Just by saying "I feel angry" you actually feel less angry.
- **Label emotions for others.** We can often disarm an emotionally charged situation by acknowledging what people are feeling. "I sense you are angry, can you tell me how you feel?" This encourages others to consider and label their emotions with greater accuracy: "Yes, I feel angry" or "No, I am not angry, I am annoyed".

Next time you are preparing for a nerve-wracking meeting with the boss—or have just had one—take a few moments to check in with your feelings, consider the emotions that will be most effective for you and for others, and choose one or more of these actions to take charge of your emotions.

Sue Langley is a sought-after speaker, facilitator and master trainer in emotional intelligence, positive psychology and the neuroscience of leadership. Sue has studied positive psychology at Harvard and is the first person in Australia to undertake the Masters of Neuroscience of Leadership. Considered one of the leaders in Australia in the practical workplace application of these fields, Sue is CEO of Emotional Intelligence Worldwide and the author of "Positive Relationships at Work," in Positive Relationships by Sue Roffey (Springer, 2012).

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